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ABSTRACT

This article presents a model for analyzing the sources of stress which trouble clients, and for designing cognitive/behavioral counseling interventions pertinent to those sources. The concept of stress as responses to both pleasant and unpleasant stimuli and the consequences of inadequate coping processes are examined. Three major sources of stress are postulated in this model, including: (1) situational (transitional life events and crises); (2) habitual (repetitive behaviors and activities); (3) and temperamental (characteristic anxiety-producing patterns of cognition and behavior). For each source of stress, specific cognitive and/or behavioral counseling strategies are suggested, such as values clarification, goal-setting and prioritization, self-management procedures, relaxation training, and "stress-inoculation" training. (Author)

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Cognitive/Behavioral Approaches tc Stress Management

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Cognitive/Behavioral Approaches to Stress Management

"The hurrieder I go, the behinder I get," states an old Pennsylvania Dutch maxim. Indeed, when an individual is caught up in an evertightening cycle of stress, it often seems that no amount of effort can help a person to unwind. Often, the more the person attempts to reduce the stress, the worse things become. It is when this situation becomes intolerable that the individual may seek assistance from a counselor to deal with stress.

This article presents a model for the identification and analysis of sources of stress, and a framework for the design and implementation of appropriate counseling strategies to reduce or alleviate such stress. Three components of the model are discussed: (1) the discrimination of major sources of stress; (2) the identification of pertinent classes of interventions to reduce client stresses from each source; and (3) specific examples of counseling techniques.

Hans Selye (1956, 1974) postulates the concept of stress to describe the nonspecific response of an organism to any demand made upon it. These demands, which he labeled "stressors," may arise from either pleasant or unpleasant stimuli and situations. Almost anything can become a stressor providing it is of sufficient duration, frequency or intensity. The organism responds to all types of stressors in three temporal stages. First, in the alarm stage, the organism recognizes the stressor and sends signals, either fight or flight reactions, via hormones released from the endocrine glands. Next comes the stage of resistance or adaptation wherein a favored mode of response is initiated, bringing the individual's dominant defenses into play. This may be followed by the third and final stage of

exhaustion whereinthe ability of the organism to cope breaks down. During the second stage of resistance, physical and/or psychological malfunctioning can appear. It is when this point is reached, that the individual may seek professional assistance to alleviate the severity of the reaction and to acquire new or improved stress-coping skills. Counselors can use the model presented here to analyze the significant sources of stress which may be contributing to a given client's distress and to plan a focus for intervention. This model hypothesizes that stress may be conceptualized as arising from three major sources: (1) situational; (2) habitual, and (3) temperamental.

Situational stress is tied to life events or circumstances which are "visited" upon an individual or which may arise as a function of significant life changes which occur rapidly or concurrently. These are the type of events which Holmes and Rahe (1967) included in their Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Several of these events occurring in temporal proximity can have a "domino effect," leaving a client feeling helpless and overwhelmed. This reaction may then lead to physical and psychological distress. Frequently the individual, unknowingly, adds to the stress by compounding these significant life events. For example, the person going through divorce may also change jobs, find a new home, engage in new recreational activities and take a vacation. Regardless of the positive or negative values of these events, the rapidity and concurrence of the changes can be enough to trigger a stress reaction. Thus, it is the rate of change as well as the quality of the events which the counselor will need to assess. The Social Readjustment Scale is a useful device to assist the counselor in making such an assessment.

In contrast to situational stress, habitual stress is caused by frequent, repetitive activities which may interfere with normal functioning. Habits of nutrition, exercise, time management, drug and alcohol use, can be contributors to a "high risk" lifestyle. Even recreational habits, such as jogging, when carried to an extreme can become stressors. Clients experiencing this type of stress generally want to exert greater control over their daily behaviors and may complain of a lack of willpower, of being "out of control".

A third major source of stress can be attributed to individual differences in temperament. Characteristic patterns of anxiety-producing cognitive and behavioral responses may contribute significantly to a person being "stress prone." The classic work of Friedman and Rosenman (1959, 1974), offers examples of the way in which differences in temperament bear upon the capacity of an individual to cope with stress. They found significant differences in behaviors among coronary prone "Type A" personalities and those, "Type B", who were not coronary prone. Type A personalities are impatient when events move slowly. They often "feel" guilty when they try to relax and do nothing. Their speech patterns are often rapid-fire, clipped, with the ends of sentences incomplete. Type A's tend to interpret most situations as personal challenges, and they respond in kind. Anger is often a prominent emotion for Type A's. Learning to become sensitive to the significance of tempermental differences is critical if the counselor is to be truly responsive to this type of client.

When the counselor has identified the significant sources of stress for a particular client, the next task is to design and implement the most appropriate strategies to enhance the client's endurance and resiliance in coping with those stressors.

Situational Stress

Situational stress, involving significant changes in life events would be most amenable to strategies involving the client in life planning and decision making. Of particular importance are value clarification, the establishment of priorities and goal-setting. The "crisis" aspects of situational stress can also be utilized to motivate significant changes along with tempering the fast pace of change which can be particularly debilitating. Taking the "long view" is a critical variable in the success of this approach.

Clients may be helped to gain a better time perspective as the counselor inquires about which decisions or activities can be delayed until tomorrow, next week, next month, etc. Reassurance by the counselor to the client that deciding not to decide to do anything, will further reduce stress, and is also productive. The conscious and deliberate effort to "stop action" decreases feelings of being helpless and overwhelmed. Once the crisis subsides, helping the client to realize that there may now be an opportunity to make long-desired positive changes can refocus counseling on life-span planning.

Habitual Stress

Habitual stress can be alleviated by involving the client in appropriate self-management procedures. Keeping daily records to identify, monitor and modify specific behaviors can be utilized to initiate change in the established behavior patterns which are creating stress. The extensive literature on self-management procedures (i.e. Mahoney and Thoresen, 1974; Mostofsky, 1976, Krumboltz and Thoresen, 1976) offers a rich variety of proven techniques for the counselor.

For the client who has a number of stress-inducing behavior patterns, the counselor should select the one which is most amenable to change. The client who experiences some immediate success in habit modification is not only likely to continue with this regimen, but will also be better able to apply the general principles he has learned to other behavior patterns. Because reinforcement plays a significant role in self-management procedures, counselors may find instruments such as The Reinforcement Survey (Cautela & Kastenbaum, 1967) useful in identifying appropriate reinforcers particularly in working with adults. This survey suggests a wide variety of unique situations, activities and objects which have been shown to have reinforcing properties for adults.

In addition to initiating a self-management program, the counselor may also want to recommend to the client who is suffering from habitual stress a support group of individuals with similar difficulties, such as Weight Watchers or Alcoholics Anonymous. The current plethora of such groups can be an important adjunctive resource to the counseling process for clients with this type of stress pattern. In the past, counselors have often been reluctant or unsure about the use of self-help groups (Caplan, 1974). However, the judicious introduction of this resource may be of special benefit in helping clients maintain changes in habitual stress patterns.

Temperamental stress

Temperamental stress is probably the most complex of the three sources to modify. Despite long-term, stress-inducing, negative consequences, certain characteristic stereotypic responses are maintained

by some individuals because of their immediate short-term stress-reducing effects. Recognizing the significance of cognitions in creating temperamental stress induction, is a powerful first step toward change. The counselor may wish to draw upon rational-emotive (Ellis, 1962) approaches to provide this type of client with some new cognitive structures. Challenging the basic assumption regarding "being first", "being fast," "being in charge" will also provide a focal point for counseling (Roskies, et al, 1978). Unraveling the interplay of inappropriate, self-defeating cognitions and behavior as described by Meichenbaum (1977) and Beck (1976) and substituting more appropriate coping statements is another aspect of this approach. Other strategies such as relaxation training, mental imagery, meditation, hypnosis and biofeedback (Stuart, 1977) can also be incorporated along with the modification of faulty internal dialogues. Meichenbaum (1977) has suggested that "stress-inoculation" training is desirable for this type of client.

The training occurs in three phases. First, the counselor provides the client with a conceptual framework for understanding stressful reactions. For example, recognizing that anger is a precursor to physiological stress would be a part of this first "educational phase". The client learns that maladaptive emotions are triggered by self-statements which can be changed.

In the second phase of stress-inoculation training, the counselor may teach the client some behaviorial and/or cognitive coping skills. This rehearsal stage may include training to control negative images, appropriate relabeling of stressful experiences, changing self-statements and practicing relaxation.

In the third phase of the training, the client is encouraged to practice new skills in vivo by coping with a variety of stressors in graduated assignments. Thus, in applying the principles of stress inoculation with a client, the counselor would: discuss the relationship of emotion and stress reactions; aid the client to rehearse coping skills; and monitor client application of the skills in the face of actual stressors.

Conclusion

In summary, the model presented here suggests that there are three significant sources of stress, situational, habitual and temperamental,which may cause a client to seek counseling. Further, it is postulated that particular kinds of counseling interventions are pertinent to each source of stress, and that the counselor can use this conceptual framework to plan the course of counseling.

As in any diagnostic classification system, one clearly cannot presume a mutually exclusive set of descriptive catagories. Obviously, there may be interaction effects among situational, habitual and temperamental sources of stress. Likewise, various combinations of the suggested interventions may be applicable across categories of stress sources. For example, self-management training for temperamentally-induced stress or relaxation training for situationally-induced stress may be additional alternatives for the counselor to consider. The model proposes, however, that the counselor will find the interventions recommended for each type of stress the most direct for initiating some immediate change in the management of stress.

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